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USSR/SPACE/JENNINGS: The Soviet Union has just announced the launch, PROGRAM the orbit and the recovery of a spaceship. That is all they've said. That is not unusual secrecy for them. As John McWethy reports, the Soviet spaceship looks pretty familiar to Americans.

MCWETHY: It is an unmanned space plane that the Soviets have been flying in and out of Earth orbit on test missions for the last two years. Even to the casual observer, it's hard not to see the resemblance to America's space shuttle. These pictures were taken by the Australian Navy a year ago in the Indian Ocean. Since that test flight, the Soviets have been bringing the space plane back to Earth in the Black Sea where they can fish it out of the water with a bit more privacy. Experts say the Soviet test yesterday was the fourth flight of this craft, which is believed to be a one-third scale model of a real Soviet space shuttle. U.S. intelligence sources say the Russians have been developing a larger version for several years and that it even more closely resembles America's space shuttle, except that it does not have reusable rocket engines and is slightly smaller. So what are the Soviets up to? Are they developing their shuttle as a platform for weapons in space for destroying satellites and shooting down missiles? JOHN STEINBRUNER (Brooks Institution): The shuttle that they've shown today is not what you would do if you wanted to develop an advanced, antisatellite capability. The issue is direct weapons use, and there's no suggestion that this shuttle is designed for that purpose.

MCWETHY: But military analysts argue that any such spacecraft can carry weapons, even if it was initially designed for other purposes. They say that is why the Soviets have for so long been suspicious of the American space shuttle and why the Reagan administration will continue to question what the Kremlin has in mind with its version. John McWethy, ABC News, the State Department.